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VALUE OF HOUSE AS A MEASURE OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES*

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The major objectives of this study are: (1) to introduce "value of house" as a measure of social rank in rural communities, (2) to establish its validity and reliability, and (3) to determine the predictive utility of the measure by comparing it with other indicators of social rank. Data have been collected from two rural Mississippi communities, Hill City and Old City. These are multicounty trade centres with populations in the 20,000 to 30,000 class which have had rapid industrialization over the past two decades. Out of a sample population of 528 household heads, 249 were drawn from Hill City and 279 from Old City. Five other measures of social rank are compared with the "value of house." Seven variables pertaining to community participation are considered for comparing the predictive capacities of the "value of house" and the other five measures in relation to these variables. The degree of correlation confirmed the validity of the "value of house" as a measure of social rank and its predictive capacities regarding the variables pertaining to community participation. Consistent results from the data on two communities determine the reliability of the "value of house" as a measure of social stratification in rural communities.

LEVEL of consumption has been considered as one of the important indicators of status in many earlier studies in social stratification (Chapin, 1933; Sewell, 1940; Rosow, 1948; Warner, *et al.*, 1949; Barber, 1957; Kahl, 1957; Hollingshead and Redlich, 1958; Lasswell, 1965). In all societies, individual's access to goods varies in the degree to which his functionally significant social role is evaluated. In other words, consumption pattern becomes part of the

social class symbolism, with the problem arising in the selection of the "best" portion of the pattern to delineate social rank.

Parsons has pointed out that, "Though the standard of living of any group must cover their intrinsically significant needs, such as food, shelter, and the like, there can be no doubt that an exceedingly large component of standards of living everywhere is to be found in the symbolic significance of many of its items in relation to status" (1954: 85).

Barber (1957:144) has indicated that the types of dwelling place and its location within the local community are likely to be symbols of social class position in all societies. He further emphasizes that the dwelling place is not only an indicator of the consumption pattern of an individual, but also a symbolic

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representation of his "style of life." Lasswell (1965:232-233) contends that, "Different cultural classes live in or desire distinctive kinds of houses in distinctive kinds of neighborhoods. This is so widespread and such a basic part of American social organization that it is more often implicit than explicit in everyday interaction and communication." He further indicates that, "The mass-produced architecture of the middle classes ignores regional boundaries more than ever. Whereas the upper class architect has been able to exploit features of the climate and terrain, the lowest class of housing continues to have its minimum cost square or rectangular shape with the cheapest materials, tolerable to climate."

Warner and his associates (1949:143) felt that social class and house type were related, and they developed a technique for observing and reporting on housing, based on the size and condition of the house, lawn, architectural design, etc. Hollingshead (1949:86), similarly, scribed the housing characteristics of Elmtown on the basis of information on home ownership and house type.

In an earlier study, Duvall (1946) considered "type of house" as one of the characteristics in his delineation of social class. Similarly, Mack (1951) attempted to associate social class with housing, and Bell (1955) indicated "rent of the house" as an important index of economic status.

All of the above studies imply that housing is an indication of something more than simply wealth or income. Furthermore, they suggest that characteristics of housing are possible indicators of social class position.

The major objectives of this study

are: (1) to utilize "value of house" as a measure of "social class"¹, (2) to introduce some other measures of social class; (3) to establish the validity and reliability of "value of house" as a measure of social class; and (4) to determine its relative predictive capacities regarding community activities and actions by comparing "value of house" with those of other measures of social class.

AREA AND METHOD

The data in the present study were collected as part of a larger, long term research project, "Community Structure and Involvement," conducted in two Mississippi communities, Old City and Hill City by the Social Science Research Center of the Mississippi State University in 1965, under a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (MHO 1229). Both of these communities are multicounty trade centers with populations in the 20,000 to 30,000 class and approximately 300 miles apart. Although these communities have had rapid industrialization over the past two decades, they are still more rural than urban.

The household heads were considered as respondents in this study. A two-stage, stratified random sampling procedure was adopted, and sample populations of 279 and 249 household heads were drawn from Old City and Hill City respectively. The same structured interview was

¹ "Social class" is defined in this study as a grouping of people of similar social rank-having accomplishments and possessions of similar value. It is a statistical category in the sense that proponents of the continuum thesis recognize a social class. The real existence of the group in interaction in this case is absent, but the expectation of a similar nature behaviour prevails due to similar demographic and cultural possessions. In this sense, it can synonymously be used with "social stratum."

used in both of these samples for the collection of information. Data from two communities were analyzed purposely to establish the reliability of the measure of social class introduced in this study.

VALUE OF HOUSE AND OTHER MEASUREMENTS

Value of House

In the present study, "value of house" was considered as a measure of the level of consumption of the household, and also as a measure of social class. The interviewers made an estimate of value of the residence on the basis of 1965 market prices in the locality in which the respondent lived. Estimates were based on the condition and size of the house, lawn, and architectural design.

The validity of the estimated market value of the houses was checked against the tax-assessor's official record in one community (Old City). Assessments had been conducted during 1964 by a professional and supposedly unbiased company from another state. Houses were assessed at 30 per cent of their market value. Land was not included in the assessment because in

numerous instances, especially among the non-white population, several houses were built on one lot.

A test of correlation was then conducted between the interviewer's estimated value of the house and the tax assessor's assessment records. The value of the correlation coefficient was found to be highly significant at .001 level of probability.²

Unfortunately, the tax-assessor's records were not available for Hill City. The investigator's estimated value of the house was found so highly correlated with those of the tax-assessor's records in Old City however, that the researcher decided to work with the investigator's estimated value for both of these two communities.

Information was recorded in five categories, but for the present research these were collapsed to a four-category scale, which seemed to be more meaningful. Distributions of the sampled population from both the cities on "value of house" are shown in Table 1.

² $r = .826$, α at .001 is .3211 where $n = 100$ (cf. Fisher and Yates, 1948:46).

TABLE 1—HOUSEHOLD HEADS BY VALUE OF HOUSE AND COMMUNITY

Value of House	Household Heads			
	Number		Per cent	
	Old City	Hill City	Old City	Hill City
\$ 50,000 and above	29	2	10	1
\$ 20,000—\$ 49,999	63	40	23	16
\$ 9,000—\$ 19,999	87	96	31	39
Below \$ 9,000	100	111	36	44
Total	279	249	100	100

It is evidenced from the table that more of the population is distributed in the upper strata and less in the lower strata, in Old City (33 percent) than in Hill City (17 percent). The median value of house in Old City was found higher than that of Hill City, \$13,483 and \$10,460 respectively. This finding was further supported by the income distribution for the samples in the two cities, where the median annual income in Old City (\$6,200) was found to be higher than that of Hill City (\$4,560).

Other Measures of Social Class

The other measures of social class considered in the present research were: residential area, prestige rating, occupation, education, and income. A comparative analysis of these five measures with the "value of house" was conducted to establish its validity as a measure of social class. Closely related to "value of house" as a measure of social class is that of *Residential Area*, since closely related to "value of house" as a measure of social class since areas tend to be relatively homogeneous as to house type and value. The basic assumption of this approach is that individuals with the same social status tend to concentrate in the same areas, and members of the different classes have different geographic distributions in the community. The members of the community are consciously aware of these distinctions and are able to verbalize these distinctions in the community.

Various studies have shown that the larger the population of an inhabited area, the more social class significance is attached to residential area, and hence the importance of residential areas for determining

social class has been emphasized (Warner, et al., 1949:39-42, 143-154; Barber, 1957:145-146; Lynes, 1957:32; Hollingshead and Redlich, 1958:387-397; Morland, 1958: 18; Whyte, Jr., 1958:331; Mills, 1959:57; Wilson, 1959; Willie, 1960; Duncan and Duncan, 1955; Schnore, 1963; Robinson, Jr., 1967; Mookherjee 1971:42-48).

The residential areas in Old City and Hill City were defined by two groups of judges in each city on the basis of "general social standing, respect or prestige of the people living in the areas" (Mookherjee, 1971: 46). One group of judges delineated the residential areas and the other group ranked those areas. These judges were selected from wide socioeconomic backgrounds and were thought to be capable of the duties assigned to them (cf. Mookherjee, 1971:42; Robinson, Jr., 1967:21-24). This procedure resulted in six and five residential strata in Old City and Hill City respectively.

The direct method of measuring prestige and power is emphasized by many sociologists. The common procedure employed in such a study is known as *Prestige Rating*, where a selected group of judges are asked to rank all or a portion of the families in the community (Warner and Lunt, 1942; Kaufman, 1944, 1946; Hollingshead, 1949; Warner, et al., 1949:47-117; Hunter, 1953). The judgments are thought to reflect the way in which community residents rank other residents using an implicit system of weights for combining a variety of status-relevant individual attributes. The basic assumption in this method is that all persons are not regarded as equals by their associates; some are regarded as superior or inferior based upon evaluation of their personal qual-

ities, possessions, statuses, or group behavior.

In the present study, the prestige rating of the individual family was done by adopting Hollingshead's modified method (1958:387-397). First, the researcher agreed with one of his colleagues,³ who was involved in the same research, that functionally Old City and Hill City could most accurately be stratified into five social strata, and afterwards, the researcher studied each family's schedule in detail. On the basis of this data, the researcher made judgments regarding the position of each family in the five-strata system of the communities. After finishing the prestige ratings in both the communities separately, the researcher and his colleague reached agreement with respect to criteria for judgment and the judged social positions of individuals. The ratings for those persons ranked differently were then modified accordingly.

The remaining three single-factor indices of social stratification, considered in the present research, are *Occupation*, *Education*, and *Income*. Occupation is assumed to represent the economic as well as the social position of a family or an individual in the community. Many of the relatively full-time, functionally significant social roles, the criteria of social evaluation, are defined as "jobs" which are the positions in a single occupational sphere (Barber, 1957:171). Moreover, at a common sense level the pervasive influence of occupational roles in modern industrial society is most apparent (Reissman, 1968:157).

A systematic procedure was adopted to categorize the occupational

titles of the sample population with an idea to develop a keener and more useful indicator of occupational stratification within the communities. At the first step, a nominal classification was done, where several broad groupings were made on the basis of occupational titles and nature of duties. These broad groupings were more or less similar to those of census classification.

In the next step, the occupations were ranked according to their prestige, and a correlation of these ranked occupations and respective incomes was made. Then a combination of logically similar occupational groups was made on the basis of their duties and income, and as a result, five distinct occupational categories were obtained, which were considered in this study as occupational strata (cf. Mookherjee, 1971:24-31).

Education was considered in this study as the second important status-determining factor. It is not only a predictor of occupational levels, but also an indicator of family background, attitudes, and values. Furthermore, in American society an increasing number of years of education is given high value with the promise of greater opportunity to "rise" socially in the mobility contest (Hollingshead, 1947; Kahl, 1957: 276-294; Demerath 1965:84; Lasswell, 1965:402-419).

Educational level of the head of the household was considered as a measure of social class in the community. Educational categories were ranked mainly on the basis of total years of schooling an individual had completed. The researcher arrived at five distinct ranks, which were thought to be of great importance in American society. This ranking was

³ The author gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of George M. Hess at this point.

premised upon the assumption that men and women, who possessed equal years of schooling would tend to have similar tastes and attitudes, and they would also tend to exhibit similar behavior patterns in general. If any critical difference was observed, it would be due to different cultural backgrounds or unique individual experiences (cf. Mookherjee, 1971:31-34).

Earlier studies indicate that income and possessions tend to reflect prestige and power positions in industrial societies (Barber, 1957:36-45; Quinn, 1963:297; Sibley, 1942; Glick and Miller, 1956). Higher incomes permit individuals to have greater amounts of quality possessions, which tend to be associated with higher prestige positions, especially in American society where material values are highly emphasized. Although some sociologists (Spengler, 1953; Warner, *et al.*, 1949:139; Lasswell, 1965:380) do not consider income as a good index of social class, it has been accepted as the reward dimension on individual status (Lasswell, 1965:365). Income is still considered by others as a simple, consensual, unidimensional continuum, and one of the most straightforward index of social class.

. In the present study, income was considered as the consumption resource which in a way symbolized the prestige and power of the household in the community. As a result, information on total amount of annual income of the families was gathered in both the communities. The individuals were asked to check the categories where their "last year's"⁴ total family income fell. The categories of the schedule were almost arbitrarily grouped into five income strata, which were thought to represent the "income-ranking" of the communities.

The respective developments of the five ranks in each of the three socioeconomic status determining factors, occupation, education, and income, are presented below:

VALIDATION OF THE VALUE OF HOUSE AS
A MEASURE OF SOCIAL CLASS

Two procedures were adopted to determine the validity and reliability of the "value of house" as a measure of social class position. First, the "value of house" was compared with the five selected measures of social class, discussed earlier, to

⁴ "Last year" indicates the year of 1964, as the data were collected in summer of 1965.

Rank	Occupation	Education	Income
1	Professionals, technicals business, proprietors.	College graduates or above (16 yrs. or more).	\$ 15,000 or above.
2	Officials, managers, supervisors ..	Some college education (13—15 yrs.)	\$ 10,000 — \$ 14,999
3	Salesman, agents, clericals ..	High school graduates (12 yrs.) ..	\$ 5,000— \$ 9,999
4	Craftsmen, foremen, operatives. ..	Some high school education (9—11 yrs.).	\$ 3,000— \$ 4,999.
5	Private house-hold workers, services, labourers (farm and non-farm).	Grade school education or none (0—8 yrs.).	Below \$ 3,000.

determine their degree of association. Second, these measures were compared with respect to their predictive capacities of the criterion variables, community participation factors. These procedures were applied to the data collected from Old City and Hill City separately.

TABLE 2—PER CENT DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLD HEADS IN DIFFERENT MEASUREMENTS OF SOCIAL CLASS IN TWO COMMUNITIES

Ranks	Old City							Hill City						
	Measurements of Social Class							Measurements of Social Class						
	Value of House ^a	Residential Area ^b	Prestige Rating	Occupation	Education	Income		Value of House ^a	Residential Area ^b	Prestige Rating	Occupation	Education	Income	
Rank 1	..	10	18	8	30	21	18	1	16	2	22	18	8	
Rank 2	..	23	18	16	13	16	12	16	21	14	15	18	12	
Rank 3	..	31	16	18	9	19	26	39	16	24	16	22	26	
Rank 4	..	36	14	19	13	11	9	44	17	26	20	12	17	
Rank 5	..	..	17	39	35	33	35	..	29	34	27	30	37	
Rank 6	..	..	16	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	
Total	..	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	

^a "Value of house" was categorized into four ranks only.
^b There was six residential areas (by rank) in Old City only.

Table 2 presents the per cent distribution of the sample populations separately for the two communities on the six chosen measures of social class. Although the table indicates that the measures have stratified the sample populations differently, there is observable similarity between some of them. The correlations between the "value of house" and the selected five other measures of social class were found by computing Goodman and Kruskal's (1954) gamma tests for association between each pair of measurements. The obtained results from the gamma tests indicated whether the same general factors expressing social stratification were measured by the six measures taken under consideration. Table 3 pre-

sents the gamma values for all combinations of the measurements for both of the two communities. The respective Z-values indicate that all of these gamma values are significant at the .001 level of probability. This finding suggests that these measures are important components of social stratification. Furthermore, the high correlations of the "value of house" with other measures of social class in both of these communities indicated the reliability of the measure. Besides the tests for association between these measures, an attempt was made to test further the adequacy of these measures with respect to their capacity for predicting other variables related to social stratification. Gamma was used again for

TABLE 3—GAMMA COEFFICIENTS^a MEASURING ASSOCIATION BETWEEN THE MEASUREMENTS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION FOR OLD CITY AND HILL CITY

Measurements of Social Stratification	Old City					Hill City				
	Residential Area	Prestige Rating	Occupation	Education	Income	Residential Area	Prestige Rating	Occupation	Education	Income
Value of House.	0.901	0.814	0.790	0.698	0.847	0.836	0.835	0.761	0.714	0.797
Residential Area.	..	0.823	0.776	0.676	0.850	..	0.732	0.626	0.634	0.683
Prestige Rating.	..	..	0.939	0.937	0.886	..	..	0.924	0.894	0.870
Occupation	..	..	..	0.765	0.842	..	..	..	0.699	0.748
Education	..	..	..	..	0.847	..	..	..	..	0.653

^aAll of these values are significant at .001 level of probability.

predictive purposes. In this study, community participation was considered as the related phenomenon to be predicted by these measures of social class. The following seven variables were considered as indicators of community participation: (1) number of local organizations in which the respondent held membership at the time of data collection; (2) number of local organizations of which the respondent was a member at the time of data collection, and held one or more positions during the last ten years; (3) number of interest areas in which the respondent was involved; (4) religious-secular typology of the participated organizations; (5) index of community support;⁵ (6) community service satisfaction index;⁶ and (7) identification of top community leaders.

⁵ Out of 27 statements on the interview schedule, 16 statements were selected, which were assumed to indicate attitude of the individuals toward community activities. With the help of the Guttman scaling technique, a cumulative scale was obtained with the 12 statements out of the above 16. This scale was named the "index of community support." For further elaboration, see Kaufman (1970:11).

Each criterion was cross-tabulated against each measurement of social stratification, and the degree of association was computed by adopting the gamma coefficient. The same procedure was applied separately to the data available from Old City and Hill City.

Table 4 presents the gamma values resulting from this cross-tabulations. An overall comparison of all of these six measures indicated a relatively small difference among the gamma values. Value of house obtained the highest gamma values in most of the cases for both of these communities.

A comparison of the relative predictability of these measures also revealed that prestige rating appeared to be the second best measure of social class along with income in both of these communities. When

⁶ Community involvement in terms of covert behaviour was measured through opinions of the respondents toward community services. The respondents were asked to rate seventeen institutions and community services on a five point scale. An average rating was computed for each respondent on the basis of the total rating he had done. These scores were named in this study as the "community service satisfaction index." For further elaboration, see Mookherjee (1971: 103-108).

TABLE 4—GAMMA COEFFICIENTS^a MEASURING ASSOCIATION OF THE MEASUREMENTS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION WITH SELECTED VARIABLES PERTAINING TO COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION FOR OLD CITY AND HILL CITY.

Community Participa- tion Variables	Old City Measurements of Social Stratification						Hill City Measurements of Social Stratification					
	Value of House	Resi- den- tial Area	Pres- tige Rat- ing	Occu- pa- tion	Edu- ca- tion	In- come	Value of House	Resi- den- tial Area	Pres- tige Rati ing	Occu- pa- tion	Edu- ca- tion	In- come
No. Orgs. Memb. ^b ..	.62	.58	.64	.57	.57	.61	.75	.62	.72	.76	.62	.72
No. Orgs. Position ^c ..	.59	.54	.62	.59	.56	.59	.36	.09 ^e	.33 ^f	.24 ^f	.40	.49
No. Interest Areas Involved ..	.72	.69	.69	.62	.66	.72	.86	.71	.83	.75	.74	.85
Rel.-Sec. Typed ^d ..	.77	.72	.73	.59	.69	.79	.84	.70	.83	.77	.72	.85
Index of Comm. Support ..	.57	.57	.44	.41	.40	.57	.70	.80	.64	.50	.54	.62
Comm. Service Sa- tisfaction Index ..	.50	.52	.44	.44	.36	.47	.63	.75	.55	.56	.43	.45
Identification of Top Comm. Leaders ..	.60	.55	.55	.55	.48	.63	.69	.80	.68	.61	.57	.64

^aAll are significant at .001 level of probability.
^bNo. of local organizations of which the respondent was a member at the time of data collection.
^cNo. of local organizations of which the respondent was a member at the time of data collection and held one or more positions during the last ten years.
^dReligious-secular typology of the membership organizations.
^eNot significant even at .20 level of probability.
^fSignificant at .01 level of probability.

the number of times a given measure of social stratification appeared among the top three values of correlation of a given participation variable was noted as a criterion for predictive efficiency of the given measure, "value of house" indicated the highest predictive efficiency in both of these cities, and prestige rating ranked second. Income, as a measure of social class, was also found to have high predictive efficiency in Old City.

Almost all of these gamma values were found to be significant at the .001 level of probability. The high probability values along with the large values for degree of association strongly supported the community participation variables as correlates

of social stratification.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study revealed the "value of house" as a useful and highly predictive measure of social stratification as one of the indicators of the consumption pattern of the household in the community.

Although previous studies suggested that consumption pattern would be a valid measure of social class, no one had attempted or argued for "value of house" so far as an indicator of this pattern. Warner, *et al.* (1949) used "house type" to indicate the general status of the family in the community, because their survey showed that people tried to rent or buy houses which fit their status. Similarly, Bell (1955) argued the

rent of house as an important index of economic status.

The "value of house" was chosen as the only available indicator of consumption pattern of the household in the present secondary analysis. To validate it as a measurement technique, the estimate of the approximate market value of the house made by the interviewer was correlated with the assessed value of the county tax-assessor. The correlation was found to be high with an r of .826.

Furthermore, between the "value of house" and other measures of social stratification a high degree of correlation was evidenced. This result was supported from the analyses of data available from two rural communities, Old City and Hill City. Further analyses indicated that "value of house" had high predictive efficacy regarding other variables pertaining to community participation.

The earlier comparative studies of the measurements of social stratification (Kahl and Davis, 1955; Atherton, 1962; Artz, *et al.*, 1971) have indicated residence as an important factor of social class. Artz, *et al.*, (1971:999-1000) has pointed out that the residential factor may represent "life style" or "consumption pattern" of the household, and residence appears to be one of the most reliable dimensions of social stratification, but in a small town but it is not as distinctive as in the larger communities. The present study however has not only established empirically the "value of house" as an important measure of social stratification in rural communities, but also has indicated its higher predictive capacity than that of the "residential area."

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